

## 2002 Delaware Growing Season Summary

### **WEATHER**

Fall 2001 brought generally above-average temperatures and continued below-average rainfall in October and into November. This allowed corn and soybean harvest and sowing of barley and wheat to proceed ahead of average progress. Topsoil moisture conditions had deteriorated to Very Short-to-Short ratings across the state, placing new seedings of barley and wheat in the Fair-to-Good condition ratings. Below normal rainfall and above average temperatures continued through the end of the year. Rainfall was below average and there was some light snowfall in January and February 2002, but did not provide cover for barley and wheat. Temperatures were well above average through January and February and into March. Heavy showers just after mid-month in March slowed early planting of potatoes and peas. After some showers and cool temperatures the first week of April the rest of the month was relatively dry and there was a new record high temperature. May saw temperatures a little above normal and rainfall below normal, allowing planting to move ahead of schedule. Thunderstorms moved through the state the first week of June, but otherwise the month was dry with above-normal temperatures. By July 1 topsoil moisture condition was rated as mostly short to adequate and rainfall for the month ranged from about one inch to nearly 3 inches below normal across the state. A very localized thunderstorm in the Bethany Beach/Rehoboth Beach area on July 19, with as much as 5-6 inches of rain, made July precipitation numbers for Sussex County look reasonable despite the fact it was not widespread. Reports of corn silking at just 3 feet of height or dying started to become common in the southern half of the state, with some fields salvaged for silage. High temperatures in the 90's were common in July and on into August. Some significant rainfall finally covered Delaware during the last week of August, an indication of wetter times to follow. Just as corn harvest was ready to get into full swing Delaware started receiving regular showers, but not enough to slow corn harvest. However, showers did result in some soybean fields starting new growth, as well as rejuvenating weed stands. As showers became more prevalent in October and into November soybean harvest got even further behind due to wet fields. The delayed soybean harvest combined with wet fields delayed and even prevented planting of wheat, some of which was sowed in December. As much as 10 percent of the soybean acres were still unharvested in December, and were not harvested until January when fields were frozen enough to support heavy equipment.

**SOYBEANS** are planted to more acres in Delaware each year than any other crop (about 15 percent of the state's land area). Planting of full season/single crop soybeans started the last week of April 2002, about a week ahead of the normal time due to dry conditions. Planting of double crop soybeans stretched past mid-July and the end of wheat harvest, a few days later than normal. By mid-July soybean condition was rated as mostly poor to fair due to lack of rain, with topsoil moisture rated as mostly very short to short. Bloom and pod setting progress ran ahead of normal due to stress from lack of moisture. Harvest began the last week of September, a few days ahead of normal, then fell much behind in October due to regular showers and wet fields. Approximately 10 percent of the acres were still unharvested in December, with most of that acreage combined in January after fields froze enough to support equipment.

Acres harvested decreased 8 percent from 2001, to 185,000 acres. Yield was just 25 bushels per acre, 14 bushels lower than in 2001 and the lowest average yield since 1995. Production decreased 41 percent, to 4.6 million bushels, our smallest soybean crop since 1987. *(Delaware's soybean yields include production from full season plantings, plus plantings following harvest of early season vegetables, barley and wheat. Typically 40-50 percent of Delaware's soybean acreage is "double-cropped.")* Although prices rebounded in 2002, the smaller crop significantly smaller crop resulted in value of the crop declining 21 percent, to \$26 million.

**CORN** acres harvested for grain in 2002 were up 3 percent from 2001, the fourth consecutive year of increase. The unseasonably dry, hot weather over the state during the season offset the increase in acres and resulted in just 83 bushels yield per acre, a 63 bushel reduction from a year earlier. Because some of the acres intended for grain had deteriorated so much by late June/Early July, it was salvaged for silage. This year New Castle County ended up with generally higher yields than the other counties, due to getting more showers. Production for Delaware was just 13.9 million bushels, down 41 percent from the large 2001 harvest and the smallest harvest since 1999. Due to some acres ending up as silage, that usage was up to 10,000 acres in 2002, with yields averaging 14 tons per acre – down from 2001's 14 tons per acre level. Value of the corn for grain crop was \$39.5 million for 2002, down 22 percent from the previous year.

**WHEAT** seeding made good progress in Fall 2001 because of favorable weather conditions that resulted in timely corn and soybean harvests. The dry winter resulted in condition of the crop being rated as 20 percent Poor, 37 percent Fair and 41 percent Good at the beginning of April. Showers during April helped improve condition by the end of the month. Maturity ran ahead of normal in Spring 2002. Harvest began the second week of June and ran ahead of normal to end at mid-July. There were 58,000 acres harvested, up 2 percent from 2001. Yield also increased, up 9 bushels per acre from 2001, to 70 bushels. The higher yield and acres resulted in pushing production up 17 percent, to 4.1 million bushels. Value of the wheat crop increased 50 percent from 2001, at \$12.8 million, due to the increase in production and prices.

**BARLEY** acreage declined for the second consecutive year for 2002, with 23,000 acres harvested, compared to 26,000 in 2001. The crop was seeded at a slightly ahead of normal pace in Fall 2001 due to the dry weather. The crop wintered over in fair condition, but was rated as 19 percent poor, 37 percent fair, 41 percent good and just 2 percent excellent at the beginning of April 2002. As with wheat, the April showers were timely and benefited the crop. Harvest got underway at the beginning of June and was completed about a week ahead of the normal date. Yield per acre increased 7 bushels from 2001, at 84 bushels per acre. The acreage decline offset the yield increase and resulted in production of a 1.9 million bushel crop, down 3 percent. Value of the crop increased 8 percent from a year earlier, to \$2.7 million, due to the higher prices.

**VEGETABLES** Delaware's vegetable industry saw production decrease in 2002 due the drought and high temperatures, but price increases for some crops helped hold up dollars received.

Vegetables for fresh market saw acreage harvested decline by 5 percent from 2001. Total production of crops for the fresh market was 274.4 million pounds, down 9 percent. Value of the fresh market production was \$35.4 million, up over 5 percent from 2001 mainly due to higher potato, sweet corn and watermelon prices. Production of crops for processing was 138,690 tons, down 6 percent from 2001, with drops in acres and lower yields due to the drought. Improved prices for lima beans and peas for processing didn't offset the lower overall production, so value of all crops for processing was \$25.1 million, 7 percent below the 2001 level.

Dry weather in February 2002 allowed early planting of some potatoes and peas until heavy showers just after mid-month in March caused a delay until the beginning of April. Sweet corn planting began the second week of April, made normal progress through early May, then ran about a week ahead of normal. Strawberry harvest began mid-May, about normal, and ended a week earlier than normal just after mid-June. Pea harvest began around mid-May and extended to mid-July, with yield per acre down just slightly, to 1.90 tons per acre despite the heat. Sweet corn harvest began the first week of July, with yields for processing and fresh market decreased from 2001 due to hot and dry growing conditions. Potato harvest started at the end of June with much improved digging conditions than in 2000, and ran well into September. Melon harvest began in early July, made steady progress through August, and extended until just after Labor Day. Lima bean harvest became active around mid-August, with yields averaging 0.91 tons per acre, a significant drop from 2001 due to the hot, dry weather.